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Humour in interaction and cognitive linguistics: critical review and convergence of approaches

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Abstract. Linguistic humour studies have been undertaken from different perspectives. The present paper offers a review of the most influential theories seeking synergies and convergence between them under the umbrella of cognitive linguistics, and, more specifically, resorting to Langacker's (2001) current discourse space (CDS) as the overall framework which can accommodate and encompass those perspectives, along with Fauconnier and Turner's (2003) Conceptual Integration Theory. A sketch of various theories is included (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; Coulson, 2005a; Veale, 2015, etc.), along with an analysis of points of convergence and similarities as the rationale for bringing them together against the backdrop of the CDS.
Keywords: humour, cognitive linguistics, humour theories, current discourse space, humour in interaction.

[es] El humor en la interacción y la lingüística cognitiva: examen y convergencia de distintos enfoques

Resumen. Desde el punto de vista de la lingüística, se han realizado estudios del humor desde perspectivas muy diversas. En el presente artículo se incluye una reflexión de las teorías más influyentes, con objeto de establecer entre ellas sinergias y convergencia. Se recurre, de forma concreta, al espacio actual del discurso (Langacker, 2001) como el marco general en el que confluyen dichas teorías, junto con la Teoría de Integración Conceptual de Fauconnier y Turner (2003). Se esbozan diversas teorías (Raskin, 1985; Attardo, 1994; Coulson, 2005b; Veale, 2015, etc.), además de proceder a un análisis de las coincidencias que existen entre ellas, de cara a demostrar que se pueden conjugar con el espacio actual del discurso como telón de fondo.
Palabras clave: humor, lingüística cognitiva, teorías del humor, espacio actual del discurso, humor en la interacción.

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1. Introduction

From a linguistic point of view, humour is arguably one of the most complex instances of communication (Veale, Brône, and Feyaerts 2015). Any communicative event is grounded in discourse (Langacker 2001) and can be approached from two points of view, namely, how it is conceptualised and how it is expressed. With that in mind, the purpose of my study is to review various cognitive linguistics approaches to humour in order to gain an insight into how humour is construed in face to face interaction.

Traditional humour theories fall under three main categories: superiority theories, release theories and incongruity theories, the latest being the most widespread paradigm applied in verbal humour studies (Attardo 1994). The notion of incongruity is largely behind almost every account of humour in linguistic theories (Raskin 1985; Giora 1997; Attardo 2001; Veale, Feyaerts, and Brône 2006; Yus 2016, etc.). Incongruity arises when we are confronted by something that breaks our expectations and does not fit in with our usual worldview.

Different linguistic humour theories can be found in the literature, from Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour (1985), or the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 2001), adopting a semantic-pragmatic approach, to Yus's Relevance Theory account of humour (2016), along with those falling under a more cognitive perspective (Giora 1991; Veale *et al.* 2006; Coulson 2015; Giora, Givoni, and Fein 2015, etc.). I believe these approaches differ in perspective, but they share core elements which can be brought together and accounted for resorting to widely studied notions in cognitive linguistics, such as Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending (2002) or Langacker's current discourse space (2001).

Cognitive linguistics provides the best framework to account for humorous communication (Veale *et al.* 2006). Cognitive linguistics considers language to be a window to the mind, providing clues on processes whereby meaning is constructed. Meaning-making in cognitive linguistics is rooted in discourse (Langacker 2001; Geraeerts 2008). It is based on usage and experience (Croft and Cruse 2004). This cognitive approach to language blurs the boundaries between traditional dichotomies in linguistics such as langue/parole (Saussure 1993), performance/competence (Chomsky 1965) or semantics/pragmatics, thus allowing for a more comprehensive account of communication.

Regardless of the approach taken to tackle humour studies, certain recurrent shared notions emerge:

a) The need for incongruity based on the interplay between two different possible interpretations of the humorous text. In cognitive linguistics, this amounts to confronting two domains, i.e., knowledge structures, which can be entrenched or novel. (Raskin 1985; Giora 1991; Attardo 2001; Brône and Feyaerts 2003, etc.).
b) One of the domains confronted is more salient, i.e. more easily accessible or more prototypical, as it is a more conventionalised and foregrounded domain (Giora 1991, 1997, 2002; Coulson 2005b). Incongruities arise from the mapping of elements from the salient space into the less salient one (or vice-versa), or as a result of foregrounding disanalogies in an emergent blended space in which the incongruity is resolved (Brône and Feyaerts 2003; Coulson 2005b, 2005c; Veale *et al.* 2006; Yus 2016).

As I see it, most linguistic approaches to humour can be brought together and explained resorting to the following cognitive linguistics notions: (a) Langacker's (2001) current discourse space (CDS), (b) Fauconnier and Turner's (2003) Conceptual Integration Theory. What follows is a brief review of major approaches in linguistic humour studies, highlighting their similarities, before offering an overarching and simplified framework of analysis. Theories based on a purely semantic-pragmatic perspective are presenting first, before addressing those with a more cognitive stance.

2. Semantic-pragmatic approach to humour

2.1. Relevance Theory and humour

Yus (2016) defined Relevance Theory as a cognitive pragmatic theory of human communication, aiming at explaining the mental process undertaken by speakers in the production of utterances, as well as the inferential strategies allowing addressees to process and interpret those utterances. He argued that the mental mechanisms at stake are universal, and are therefore applicable also to humorous communication. This claim is tantamount to saying that humorous discourse is not interpreted utilizing special procedures, but on the basis of a "single cognitive criterion" (Yus 2016: xv).

Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986) claims that human cognition is set to maximise relevance; that is, to obtain as much information as possible from inputs received in a communicative situation, verbal or otherwise, with as little cognitive effort as possible.

In humorous communication, though, it is clear that jokes or other forms of humorous utterances are not necessarily very informative, as in (1) (Attardo 1994: 285):

(1) Have you heard the latest?
No? Well, neither have I.

Furthermore, humour comprehension does take additional cognitive effort on the part of the hearer. This additional effort, though, is compensated by the humorous effect: pleasure in incongruity resolution, laughter (tension release), group bonding, etc. RT is based on three major theoretical assumptions: that all humans seek the maximum relevance in communication, that inputs in ostensive communication are presupposed to be optimally relevant, and that all utterances are less informative than what they are meant to communicate (Sperber and Wilson 1986). In other words, the pragmatic value of an utterance always goes beyond its semantic value.

RT also claims that humans are endowed with a mind-reading ability (Yus 2016), enabling speakers to make predictions about how their utterances will be interpreted. This is crucial for the production of humour, as the speaker can foresee what interpretation is more likely to be favoured by the hearer, i.e. the most relevant, to use it as a bait to mislead the hearer toward it before producing the humorous effect, associated with a less likely─a priori less relevant─interpretation (Curcó 1997).

Yus (2016) pointed to two universal cognitive systems leading to two different types of inferences: inferential, to process the utterance, and social, to compare in-

ferences made with stored cultural information. He claimed both systems are activated simultaneously and argued that the social system is culture-specific. To me, our conceptualisation of the world—which cannot be dissociated from our experience of it, and is therefore necessarily embodied and culture-bound—affects how we communicate in general: how we produce and interpret communicative inputs, verbal or otherwise. In my view, there is only one cognitive system allowing us to process communication through the combination of semiotic, semantic, pragmatic and cognitive elements. Furthermore, RT is only concerned with the pragmatic analysis of ostensive communication; that is, communication in which there is both a communicative intention on the part of the speaker and an informative intention, referring to the actual information that is meant to be conveyed. Accidental, non-ostensive communication is excluded from RT analysis (Yus, 2016). However, I argue that humorous communication may sometimes be non-ostensive and still achieve to convey a humorous effect retrieved by the hearer. Therefore, any account of communication including only those instances in which interlocutors clearly show they want to communicate is partial, as it is leaving aside many instances of communicative situations in which that desire to communicate is neither ostensive nor manifest.

2.2. Raskin's Semantic Script Theory of Humour

The Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin 1985) was designed to explain the speaker's humour competence in an idealised communicative (humorous) situation. Therefore, it excludes instances of humour in interaction. SSTH applies solely to single jokes, not to larger texts or other types of humour. Raskin's theory predicts humour will occur if the following conditions are met: (a) the joke text is compatible with two different scripts, which fully or partially overlap; (b) both scripts are opposite.

A script is a set of organised prototypical contextual and lexical information in the mind of the speaker and addressee (Raskin 1985). Attardo (1994: 199) equated the notion of *script* to that of Fillmore's (1976) *frames,* among other terms used to refer to this kind of cognitive structures, stating that the difference is merely terminological. Scripts link to form semantic networks including lexical and non-lexical scripts as well as all the links. Semantic networks contain all the information a speaker has about their culture (Attardo 1994).

Scripts may be combined in different ways leading to various meanings. Coherent interpretations yielded by these combinations will be stored as the meaning of the text, which is then considered to be well-formed (Attardo 1994). Occasionally, texts may be compatible with different scripts. When the overlapping scripts are opposed to each other, humour occurs, as in example (2), taken from Raskin (1985: 11):

> (2) "Is the doctor at home?", the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No", the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in".

In (2) two possible scripts are elicited by the joke. One, more salient (Giora 1991) script, in which the patient goes to the doctor's house to seek medical assistance. Another, less salient script, in which the patient is seeking to spend time alone with the doctor's wife. In the latter, intimacy is conveyed through the whispering tone of the conversation. The patient whispers because he has a chest infection; the doctor's

wife whispers as a sign of intimacy. The hearer is compelled to switch scripts by a section in the text which acts as a script-switch trigger. In (1), this trigger would be the "Come right in" invitation by the doctor's wife.

Attardo (2003) claimed that SSTH fully integrates semantics and pragmatics, but I argue that it is essentially a semantic theory, as the humorous nature of the text —namely, the joke—is eventually placed on the text itself and not on the context or the communicative situation. Also, as one of its main premises is to account for the speaker's humorous competence and its object of study is an idealised communicative situation, it explicitly leaves out the pragmatic value of context in the production of humour.

As I see it, the complex nature of humour makes any analysis based on a single approach incomplete. The SSTH constitutes a valid first-step analysis. Humour may lie, among other things, in the semantic value of texts—or utterances—.The SSTH provides a valid framework to start to grasp how humour is created, but a wider approach is needed to account for the complexity of humorous communication. In fact, Attardo (2001) stressed a semantic-pragmatic perspective in his own revision of SSTH, his General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), explained in the following section.

2.3. Attardo's General Theory of Verbal Humour

Attardo (1994) portrayed his General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 2001) as a revision of Raskin's SSTH (1985), in order to account for any kind of humorous texts, including larger texts.

GGTV considers script opposition, the core element to account for humour in SSTH, to be just one of 6 knowledge resources (KR) necessary to produce humour (Attardo 1994: 27):

a) SO – Script Opposition: taken from SSTH.
b) LM – Logical Mechanism: the logical relation between both scripts (false analogies, juxtaposition, etc.). This is the cognitive mechanism used to solve the incongruity leading to humour.
c) TA – Target: the target of the joke (in aggressive humour; non-aggressive humour have a 0 value in this parameter).
d) NS – narrative strategy: the structure of the text (narrative, dialogue, etc.).
e) LA – language: the information necessary to place language elements in the right place and correctly verbalise the text.
f) SI – situation: the situation in which the text is placed (participants, settings, etc.)

According to GTVH, humour arises from different combinations of the values assigned to KR. Attardo's theory establishes a hierarchy whereby each parameter is constrained by those above and determines those below:

$$SO \rightarrow LM \rightarrow SI \rightarrow TA \rightarrow NS \rightarrow LA$$

Veale *et al.* (2006), however, argued that KRs cannot be analysed in isolation and that they interplay all along the humour interpretation process. For Brône and Feyaerts (2003), the GTVH is essentially a cognitive theory, as it aims at explaining

humorous use of language drawing on parameters of different kinds, among which the LM is cognitive in nature.

Although GTVH aims at being a comprehensive linguistic theory of verbal humour, expanding its scope beyond canned jokes to include more extensive texts, Attardo himself acknowledged that "its application to conversational humour is less than straightforward" (Attardo 1994: 68). Therefore, a more encompassing perspective is required, including all instances of humorous communication. As explained in section 3, cognitive linguistics provides such a perspective.

3. Humour and cognitive linguistics

In cognitive linguistics, meaning and language structure are, to a great extent, determined by our experience of the world (Geraeerts 2008). Language and cognition, therefore, cannot be separated, and are influenced by the interplay between social, cultural, psychological, communicative and functional elements (Brône and Feyaerts 2003).

In cognitive linguistics, humour is considered a phenomenon in which the same cognitive-semantic strategies underlie its different instantiations: verbal and non-verbal humour, puns, etc. (Brône and Feyaerts 2003). Cognitive linguistics provides a holistic perspective for the study of humour, which cannot be considered as an isolated phenomenon arising from the non-prototypical use of language (or other modes of communication), but as part of a cognitive system in which humour is processed beyond mere linguistic mechanisms.

Cognitive linguistics offers the best framework for a comprehensive study of humour (Brône and Feyaerts 2003; Brône, Feyaerts, and Veale 2006; Veale *et al.* 2015; Dynel 2018). It does away with artificially drawn boundaries between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics to account for conceptualisation at all levels of language structure (Brône *et al.* 2006), acknowledging the key role of discourse and embodiment in meaning construction (Langacker 2001). It is an umbrella paradigm in which different approaches to humour can converge and be reconciled. Hence, I aim to provide a simplified overall framework of analysis, based on cognitive linguistics, where different perspectives with a more or less evident cognitive stance (Clark 1996; Attardo 2001; Coulson 2005b, 2005c, 2015; Brône 2008; Veale 2015) can be brought together into that basic account.

In cognitive linguistics, meaning stems from conceptualisation and is attained through construal operations (Croft and Cruse 2004; Langacker 2008). Conceptualisation is based on our experience of the world, which is categorized in frames (Fillmore 1976). Frames are mental representations of the kind of experience elicited by a given sign or code (i.e., language, gestures, etc.), allowing us to produce and comprehend language mainly by means of analogy and comparison of the input received against that frame. In light of the above, humour related-incongruity would involve two different mental representations or frames, compatible with the same input. This is the same idea applied in Raskin's (1985) SSTH and Attardo's (1994) GTVH, as explained in sections 2.2 and 2.3 respectively, in which humour arises from the switch between frames or scripts.

Following up on the same notion, Giora (1991) introduced the concept of *salience* in her account of humour, in which the shift occurs from a more salient, foreground-

ed (hence, prototypical, more conventionalised) interpretation of the humorous text to a second unexpected one. She developed the graded salience hypothesis (Giora 1997), whereby there is always a more salient interpretation to an utterance, which is activated and accessed first. Only when that salient interpretation is not appropriate given the communicative context, is the less salient meaning elicited. Humour arises from the ambiguity between the more salient interpretation and the actual, less salient, one leading to the humorous effect. Again, this is reminiscent of the notion of script opposition advocated by Raskin (1985) and Attardo (1994).

Coulson (2005a), and Coulson and Oakley (2005) focused on blending (Fauconnier and Turner 2003) as one major process underlying humour. Blending (also called conceptual integration), involves the combination of elements from different cognitive representations or mental spaces. Typically, there are at least two input spaces, a generic space (a representation of an underlying structure common to all spaces) and the blended space, with elements from all input spaces and which can develop a semantic structure of its own (Fauconnier and Turner 1998, 2002). Conceptual blending accounts for the online creation of new meaning in conversation (Fauconnier and Turner 2002).

4. Humour in interaction from a cognitive perspective

The interactional value of humour has received much attention in recent literature (Holmes 2000; Hay 2001; Baxter 2002; Holmes and Marra 2002; Archakis and Tsakona 2005, etc.). As explained in section 3, purely semantic-pragmatic approaches to humour in the literature are not easily applicable to the study of conversational humour. Cognitive linguistics, in turn, provides a more comprehensive framework of analysis. What follows is an account of the most relevant literature on interactional humour from a cognitive perspective, in order to pinpoint similarities and seek convergence of various approaches into a broader and simpler framework of analysis.

Whenever interaction takes place among interlocutors, a negotiation process is entailed whereby turn-taking is organised and each speaker's discourse structured for communication to be successful. Humorous communication is no exception, all the more so as for humour to be successful, it must be somehow acknowledged by the counterpart in the conversation. The strategies implemented to acknowledge humorous utterances are called humour support (Hay 2001).

Hyper-understanding (Veale *et al.* 2006) and misunderstanding (Brône 2008) are hailed as two significant kinds of interactional humour. Hyper-understanding stems from the speaker's ability to reverse the intending meaning of the previous speaker's utterance, exploiting weak points found in it to achieve a humorous effect. Misunderstanding was defined by Brône (2008: 2027) as a "genuine misinterpretation of a previous utterance by a character in the fictional world". Both phenomena imply a conflict between different viewpoints.

Brône (2008), Feyaerts (2013), and Tabacaru (2014) resorted to Clark's layering model of communication (1996) to account for these two phenomena. It is argued that Clark's model can be used to explain any type of non-serious language, such as fiction, irony, sarcasm, over- and understatements, rhetorical questions, etc. Clark's model depicts discourse as multiple layers sharing a surface represented by the communicative situation.

Brône combined this layered-meaning structure of discourse with Fauconnier's mental spaces (1997). Mental spaces are "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action" (Fauconnier and Turner 2003: 58). They allow us to structure discourse. Brône argued that the mental spaces elicited in humorous communication are distinct but connected across the discourse layers.

Both models are combined to account for the conflict of viewpoints in hyper-understanding and misunderstanding. The humorous effect of misunderstanding is explained by means of the clash between the salient interpretation favoured by contextual elements, and the misinterpretation (non-salient interpretation) of one of the participants in the interaction. Hyper-understanding, in turn, is explained resorting to a figure-ground reversal mechanism (Attardo 2001), whereby weak points in the previous speaker's utterance are exposed to achieve a humorous effect. Both phenomena are metarepresentations of discourse: hyperunderstanding involves the creation of a pretence space in which the speaker dissociates him or herself from what has been said by their counterpart. Misunderstanding, on the contrary, relies on the erroneous mapping of features to the interlocutor's own space.

Coulson (2005a) resorted to blending and mental spaces to account for conversational humour. She argued that humorous blends are shaped by the demands of conversation: the need to maintain relevance implies that speakers must take at least one element of the input blend created by the previous speaker. On the other hand, the requirement to contribute new information is met by bringing in a new input within the activated shared larger cognitive structure to produce a new blend.

Feyaerts (2013) tackled spontaneous conversational humour from a socio-cognitive perspective. He argued that meaning is not just a process of conceptualisation but is also the result of interactive negotiation between interlocutors in conversation. He focused on the intersubjective aspects of meaning. He defined intersubjectivity as the ability to figure out the mental spaces represented by our interlocutors. Meaning construction in interaction will largely depend on the common ground shared by the interlocutors (Clark 1996).

Veale *et al.* (2006) argued that humour is first and foremost a social-interactional phenomenon. They focused on adversarial humour, studying it from a cognitive perspective. They defined 'trumping' as a series of humorous exchanges subverting the use of language, whose interpretation involves thorough knowledge of the interlocutors, therefore representing a highly complex form of interactional humour. They drew on previously studied mechanisms to account for adversarial humour: Attardo's GTVH figure-ground reversal mechanism (2001) and Langacker's conceptual profiling (Langacker 1991). These mechanisms are general meaning-construal mechanisms, not only applying to humour. In addition, they resort to the current discourse space (Langacker 2001) to account for the vast shared knowledge required for adversarial humour to occur.

Langacker (2001: 144) defined the current discourse space (CDS) as "the mental space comprising those elements and relations construed as being shared by the speaker and hearer as a basis for communication at a given moment in the flow of discourse"; that is, the background setting containing all shared information and cognitive structures that will be rearranged as communication flows, leading to the dynamic creation of meaning through different construal mechanisms. I posit that both the semantic and pragmatic approaches to humour converge under this perspec-

tive, as conceptualisation —therefore dynamic meaning— is rooted in discourse, thus acknowledging both the meaning-making production and context-related interactional facets.

5. The current discourse space

Langacker (2001) linked cognitive grammar to discourse, claiming that all linguistic units result from the abstraction of usage events, i.e. actual examples of language use. Fig. 1 illustrates the different elements comprised in a usage event:

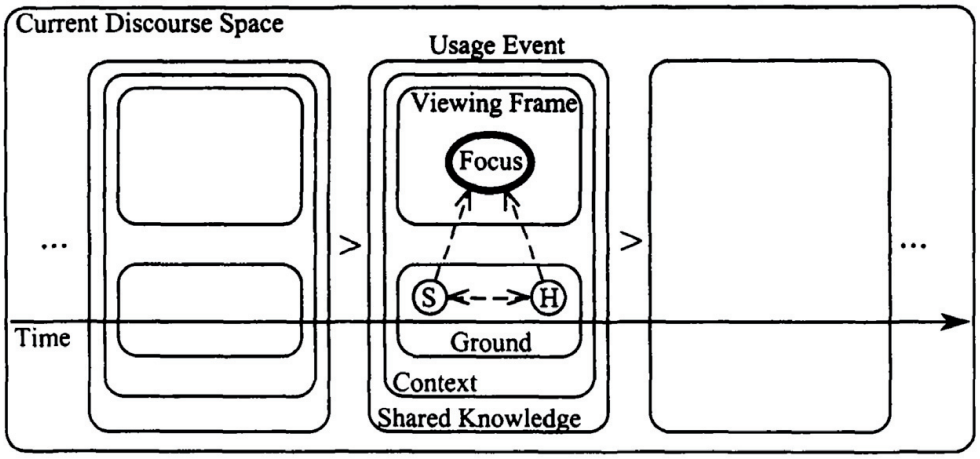

Figure 1. Representation of a usage event (Langacker 2001: 145).

The ground is the communicative situation itself, including the speaker, the hearer, the time and place of the event, etc. The context of a usage event refers to the immediate context of speech, including "the physical, mental, social and cultural circumstances" (Langacker 2001: 145), whereas the shared knowledge is made of background and encyclopaedic knowledge shared by interlocutors beyond the immediate context. The viewing or discourse frame is the scope of representation and conceptualisation interlocutors have at any given time, which is necessarily limited. Within the activated viewing frame, a certain focus of attention is profiled against the background by multimodal means (verbal, gesture, intonation, gaze, etc.).

The CDS is, therefore, the overarching framework in which communication is taking place, including subsequent usage events—and obviously all their components therein—. The CDS evolves as a result of and is transformed by the linguistic structures in usage events. To some extent, Langacker acknowledged multimodal inputs as linguistic units in his description of usage events as bipolar events, with a conceptualisation pole and a vocalisation pole. Multiple coordinating channels enrich each pole. The conceptualisation pole comprises three channels: information structure, speech management (basically turn-taking) and the objective situation (the most prominent channel). In turn, the vocalisation pole would be fed through gestures, intonation, and segmental content.

6. Convergence of approaches

In light of what has been explained in section 5, I believe that CDS is the basic framework for communication and conceptualisation, including humour (Veale *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, it provides a framework where different approaches to humour can converge, as the role of semantics, pragmatics and discourse to enable successful communication is fully acknowledged, on the basis of a highly overlapping construal of the speech event by all participants in the interaction. In the following subsections, linguistic theories of humour are reviewed under the perspective of the CDS (Langacker 2001) and conceptual blending (Fauconnier and Turner 2002) to make a case for the use of these notions as the overall framework of analysis to account for humour in interaction.

6.1. General Theory of Verbal Humour

Brône and Feyaerts (2003) already claimed that GTVH is a cognitive theory, insofar as it explores the interface between language and cognition by studying how different parameters relate and contribute to creating humorous meaning. In particular, they pointed to the fundamentally cognitive nature of the Logical Mechanism, one of the six knowledge resources posited by Attardo (2001) as parameters that define the humorous text. The Logical Mechanism allows for the partial resolution of the incongruity at the core of the joke.

Attardo (2001, 2015) also resorted to mental spaces in his account of humour, where he advocates for the adoption of a certain humorous mode leading to a possible world—akin to a mental space, in Attardo's view—where interlocutors can then operate. Attardo defines mode adoption as the "acceptance on H's [hearer's] part of a possible world, as defined by S [speaker], which differs from [the real world], i.e., the world that S and H mutually know" (Attardo 2001: 176). Utterances that can trigger mode adoption, e.g. irony, humour, metaphor, etc. will enable the construal of a new mental space next to the base/reality space, so that the hearer does not have to reject the utterance as ill-formed.

The GTVH is therefore fully compatible with a cognitive account of humour. Mental spaces are always construed, elicited, and blended as we communicate. Once humour is recognised in a given construal of a situation, as represented through the relevant mental spaces, humour can be further developed by means of elaborating that mental space, which is in line with Attardo's mode adoption proposal. Furthermore, I view the six knowledge resources posited by GTVH as potential elements in mental spaces; the logical mechanism would govern the mapping of relevant items between mental spaces, and the relations established therein so that the resulting blend is recognised as novel and humorous.

Furthermore, in his elaboration upon the GTVH, Attardo (2001) referred to a storage area with mutually assumed and shared information as a main feature of the theory. To me, this storage area is akin to the current discourse space. Attardo further posited that the information is stored in "clusters of information (scripts, frames) that come surrounded by a web of associations and links to other clusters of information" (2001: 47). In other words, a conceptual integration network. Attardo acknowledged that "the GTVH has been mainly developed on the basis of canned jokes and that its application to conversational humour is less than straightforward" (2001: 68). He

claimed that conversational jokes are created online and depend heavily on context and that speakers constantly negotiate and update what they assumed to be mutually known and what they consider to be relevant at any point in the interaction. I argue that Langacker's (2001) current discourse space can account for all the elements that enable such negotiation and updating process.

6.2. The Space Structuring Model

Coulson and Oakley (2005) combined mental spaces with Langacker's (2001) notion of ground to account for the role played by context in meaning construction. Their conceptual integration network model includes not only input spaces but also what they called a grounding box, including the elements of Langacker's ground in the CDS, i.e. interactants, interaction, speech event and immediate circumstances. They claimed that the grounding box is not a mental space and may not be representational.

The grounding box contains the analyst's list of important contextual assumptions, which need not be explicitly represented by speakers, though they influence the way that meaning construction proceeds. When those assumptions are explicitly represented by speakers, they are represented as models in mental spaces within the integration network. They posited that contextual assumptions and concerns affect meaning construction because the grounding box can be used to specify roles, values, and experiences that in turn will contribute to grounding speakers' subsequent representations (Coulson and Oakley 2005: 1517).

To me, the whole current discourse space can be drawn upon for background knowledge and conceptual assumptions. The elements that can help to "specify roles, values, and experiences that ground subsequent representations" (Coulson and Oakley 2005: 1534) can be drawn from any of the components of the CDS. The CDS constrains the kind of mental spaces that can be elicited in a usage event, but it is a dynamic process, whereby recruited mental spaces and elements trigger changes in the CDS too, opening new possibilities for conceptualisation and communication in subsequent usage events.

Coulson (2005a, 2005b) also resorted to blending theory to offer her account of humour, named the space structuring model. She proposed that "comprehension of a single event frequently requires speakers to set up multiple models of the same object in different mental spaces, in order to capture the differences between the object's properties in different contexts" (Coulson 2005b: 134). She claimed that humour is an indirect form of communication that entails the simultaneous construction of multiple mental spaces and blended models that often highlight disanalogies between the models elicited by the input mental spaces.

Coulson claimed that humour, in this case, might boil down to the unexpected perspective on the situation offered by this conceptual integration network. Furthermore, she posited that the process enabling joke comprehension within her space structuring model is frame-shifting (Coulson 2015), defined as a "semantic and pragmatic reanalysis in which elements of the existing message-level representation are mapped into a new frame retrieved from long-term memory" (Coulson, Urbach, and Kutas 2006: 229). She further argued that linguistic and non-linguistic information is integrated rapidly and does not require the prior representation of the propositional content of an utterance. For Coulson, meaning construction stems from a series of

routines that involve the creation of cognitive models (mental spaces) enabling "interpretation, action, and interaction" (Coulson *et al.* 2006: 247).

The simultaneous construction of multiple mental spaces advocated by Coulson's space structuring model is entirely possible within the CDS, always associated to the conceptualisation pole of the utterance, as specified in the three relevant channels in the viewing frame. The grounding box presented in her model of conceptual integration really points to the significance of context in how we construe, represent, and communicate a given situation. Finally, I understand frame-shifting as a type of blending, where the ongoing conceptual integration network created online during interaction brings in a frame, i.e. an entrenched mental frame, to confront it with the current representation of discourse.

Coulson claims that inputs from language, perception, social context and the interlocutor's cognitive state contribute to meaning and to construing the discourse situation in a particular manner. Therefore, changes in any of those elements result in different conceptualisation and meaning construction. I consider that all those elements are encompassed in Langacker's (2001) depiction of current discourse space. I thus believe that the CDS can be used as the basic framework for communication and conceptualisation, including humour (Veale *et al.* 2006).

6.3. Conceptual Subversion

Veale (2015) put forward a complementary approach to what he calls juxtapositional theories of humour, which are largely based on mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994, 1997), frame-shifting (Coulson and Kutas 2001; Coulson 2015), and script opposition (Raskin 1985; Attardo 2001). He acknowledged the inherently juxtapositional nature of humour, as it always entails some form of comparison to yield an innovative view with regards to what is considered normative or is expected. He argued, though, that the crucial element for humour production and comprehension is the nature of the structures that are juxtaposed. For Veale, humour lies in the conceptual subversion of a given category or mapping, rather than in the combination of different but overlapping categories. In other words, Veale argued that humour production and comprehension is not based on blending or cross-mapping various different input spaces (frames, scripts or mental spaces), but rather in manipulating and exploring the boundaries of a single input structure in order to identify novel and interesting counter-examples. He refers to this process as subversion.

He further posited that the appropriate counter-example to the category subverted is constructed "by stripping away the layers of conventionality and habitual thinking that have accreted around a category" (Veale 2015: 77). In my view, the counter-example advocated by Veale as necessary to construe a novel and creative view of a given category is reminiscent of Coulson's space structuring model (2005b). This approach advances that the simultaneous mental spaces of the object, category, event, etc. to be construed are created as different versions of that concept. This allows identifying the differences between those possible conceptualisations. Veale's counterexample, therefore, would be one of those mental models created and confronted to the traditional frame (as an entrenched mental space) depiction of the category.

Let's consider one of the examples used by Veale (2015) to illustrate his point, in which he reports a witticism by Zsa Zsa Gabor, a woman known for her multiple marriages and divorces:

(3) Darlink *[sic.]*, actually I am an excellent housekeeper. Whenever I leave a man, I keep the house! (Veale 2015: 77)

Veale claimed that the humour in this remark stems from a novel reading of the term 'housekeeper', which introduces a new member into that category, i.e. a woman who literally keeps the house rather than a woman that strives to maintain the house in good condition and make everything work for the family. According to Veale, the category of 'housekeeper' is thus subverted to introduce a novel reading. I agree with his claim that the boundaries of the category are exploited creatively for humorous purposes, but I still believe that in order to subvert such category a novel blended space is construed from multiple inputs, which could schematically be described in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Conceptual integration network leading to subversion of the category.

Zsa Zsa Gabor	**Housekeeper**	**House - keeper**
Failed marriage Divorce House ownership	Successful marriage House work Housekeeping	Failed marriage Divorce Keeps/owns house

In this particular example, comprehension of the subversion entailed in Zsa Zsa Gabor's comment is facilitated and made salient by her own words. Furthermore, subversion of the category actually relies on the contrast between the typical construal of a diligent and hardworking housekeeper, and the depiction of an independent and non-conventional woman that collects houses upon divorcing one husband after another. Consequently, in my view, conceptual subversion is one of the possible outcomes resulting from conceptual integration networks. Completely novel concepts, new category members or boundaries, or unexpected mappings between inputs may arise as a result of an emergent structure in the blend.

Veale's proposal helps to understand one of those phenomena better. Besides, I posit that any of the different components of Langacker's (2001) CDS─viewing frame, ground, context, shared knowledge, previous usage events and expectations on subsequent usage events─can be recruited to subvert the concept at hand. In that, my view converges with Veale's, as he considers that humour does not lie in the subversion itself, but in the pragmatic and social uses of that subversion.

6.4. Layering Model and Pretence Space

Clark's (1996) model of layered meaning has been used by some authors to account for humour (Brône 2008; Tabacaru 2014). Clark posited that communication can occur at different levels, as there may be several layers of conceptualisation which are like "theatre stages built one on top of the other" (Clark 1996: 16). Conversations may just occur on the first layer, but additional layers may be necessary for instances of indirect speech, such as irony or humour. According to Brône (2008), layers represent different discourse worlds based on the actual utterances, which conform the surface level. In humour, sarcasm or irony, the first layer is the discourse base space,

with the literal interpretation of an utterance, whereas a pretence space is created in a second layer, in which the intended meaning of the utterance becomes apparent (Brône 2008; Tabacaru 2014). Brône, therefore, equated layers to mental spaces, and so does Coulson (2005b). Tabacaru (2014) argued that layering and mental spaces show how people can access and process information, and how communication is made possible by resorting to meaning derived from previous discourse or background knowledge.

This is fully compatible with an account of humorous communication based on Langacker's (2001) CDS and Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) blending. Parallelisms can be drawn between the pretence space (Clark 1996; Brône 2008) and the notion of counterexample leading to subversion (Veale 2015) as part of the multiple mental spaces construed in interaction to confront and conceptualise the possible various readings of a given object or event (Coulson 2005b). As for the relevance of discourse and background knowledge, it is fully explained by the role that the CDS and all elements therein play in communication at large.

Table 2 below summarises the main elements in the reviewed approaches, along with the points of convergence found to bring them into an overall framework based on Langacker's CDS (2001) and Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual blending (2002).

Table 2. Main points of convergence among approaches to humour.

Space structuring model (Coulson and Oakley, 2005)	**GTVH (Attardo, 1994)**	**Conceptual subversion (Veale, 2015)**	**Layering model (Clark, 1996; Brône, 2008; Tabacaru, 2014)**
Conceptual Integration Network + grounding box (akin to Langacker's ground in CDS). The grounding box is not a mental space; may be not representational. Grounding box: contains contextual assumptions not explicit by interactants (roles, values, experiences) Multiple mental spaces simultaneously. Disanalogies foregrounded. Frame shifting: reanalysis of frame due to mapping from current mental spaces	Logical Mechanism: it governs mapping between mental spaces. Rest of knowledge resources: elements in mental spaces. Mode Adoption (Attardo, 2001): construal of a new mental space next to the reality space. Ironic or humorous mode. Storage area (Attardo, 2001): mutually assumed and shared information (akin to CDS)	Complementary to juxtapositional theories of humour (incongruity, comparison). Humour linked not to the cross-mapping of two mental spaces, but in the subversion of a single input structure. Counter-example construed "stripping away layers of conventionality and habitual thinking" (akin to frame-shifting). Humour lies in the pragmatic and social uses of the subversion.	Discourse base space (DBS) (layer 1) + pretence space (PS). Different discourse worlds based on actual utterances. DBS: literal meaning PS: intended meaning Layers = mental spaces

7. Discussion

The approaches to humour listed above describe the mechanisms whereby humour is produced and understood from a pragmatic and cognitive point of view. Nevertheless, the question remains as to where the humorous nature of a given utterance, text, situation, etc. lies.

The most widespread paradigm in current humour studies is the incongruity-resolution (IR) principle. The concept of incongruity, therefore, is present in such ideas as script-opposition (Raskin 1985; Attardo 2001)─although Raskin rejects having his SSTH theory categorised as an IR theory (Raskin, Hempelman, and Taylor 2009)─, frame-shifting (Coulson *et al.* 2006; Coulson 2015), relevant inappropriateness (Attardo 2000), discrepancies (de Jongste 2016), pretence theory (Clark 1996; Brône 2008), etc.

These concepts differ to some extent but mostly overlap around the idea of incongruity as a mismatch in expectations (Bergen and Bindsten 2004), a surprise (Giora 1991), a violation of conventional wisdom (Coulson *et al.* 2006; Coulson 2015), etc. Forabosco (2008: 45) stated that a stimulus is perceived as incongruous when it diverts from the cognitive model of reference. This very much resonates with the process underlying the frame-shifting model (Coulson *et al.* 2006; Coulson 2015)**.** Broadly speaking, incongruity-resolution models assume that behind any instance of humour lies an incongruity that has to be resolved, at least in part.

Notice that incongruity does not *per se* entails the notion of outfront opposition. What incongruity implies is a perceived lack of coherence, a breach of expectations, not necessarily by confronting opposing readings or mental frames. Having said that, for humour to arise, expectations need to be broken. That clash in expectations may be due to the presentation of opposing ideas, the subversion of a category, the unwinding of cultural conventions, the momentary deception with regards to assumptions on future usage events in a current discourse space, etc. In my view, that clash of expectations is manifested through a radical disruption in the CDS, in any of the components therein; i.e. the focus of attention, the ground, context or shared knowledge.

Having said that, the presence of an incongruity alone is not sufficient for humour to arise, as incongruities exist in a variety of situations where humour will most probably not be the outcome (Morreal 1983; Veale 2015). Morreal posited that humour is a cognitive phenomenon─as it involves perception, thought, mental patterns and expectations─that triggers a sudden cognitive shift that we find pleasurable because we perceive it as a kind of play. For that, we need to be in "a play mode, disengaged from practical and noetic concerns" (1983: 243). In other words, humour can only arise if we have a certain predisposition towards it.

De Jongste (2018) claimed that the basic requirement for successful humorous communication is that interlocutors shared or can quickly switch into a paratelic, i.e. non-serious, state, in which the orientation towards essential objectives is suspended. This allows for a challenging but pleasurable form of play in which interlocutors negotiate and coordinate their construal of the situation. De Jongste further posited that when people are not in a paratelic state or cannot switch to it because of certain emotions, for example, they may still recognise a certain stimulus as humorous, but they will reject it and not engage in it. Ultimately, for humorous interaction to be successful, both interlocutors need to share mutual assumptions about how

the counterpart is construing the speech event, so that they can engage in the negotiation, alignment and re-alignment of their intersubjective viewpoints (Feyaerts 2013), drawing upon the different elements of the current discourse space, which fully acknowledges the role of the pragmatic and discourse dimension in determining whether humour succeeds or fails (Veale 2015).

8. Conclusion

In the previous sections, I provided a streamlined and simplified model to account for humorous communication based on Langacker's (2001) notion of current discourse space and Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) theory on blending and conceptual integration networks. In doing so, I join many authors that claim that there are not linguistic mechanisms specific to humour; rather, it can be described by the same linguistic principles governing communication at large (Bergen and Bindsten 2004; Brône and Feyaerts 2003; Brône *et al.* 2006; Tabacaru 2014; Veale *et al.* 2015; Dynel 2018).

In addition, I bring together different approaches to humour with a more or less explicit cognitive stance, in order to seek similarities and convergence. The purpose of this exercise was to distil the essence of the different models and notions put forward to find the common denominator, as a way to map out the core features of humorous communication and account for them in a simplified model. As I see it, the current discourse space (Langacker, 2001) encompasses all elements pertaining to a given instance of face-to-face interaction. All those elements can be recruited to elicit and construe humorous (and non-humorous) meaning in conversation. Interlocutors align their intersubjective viewpoints redirecting the viewing frame in the current discourse space, where the creation and interpretation of new meaning online occurs through blending and conceptual integration networks. Incongruities leading to humour stem from a sudden disruption in the current discourse space; i.e., a mismatch in expectations regarding any of the elements therein.

Finally, I pondered what it is that renders an instance of communication humorous, again by exploring the explanations offered by major authors in the field, to conclude that humour is a highly complex and varied phenomenon that is hard to categorize. In essence, humour is a cognitive-social phenomenon (Feyaerts, Brône, and De Ceukelaire 2015) based on a pleasurable sudden cognitive shift (Morreal 2009a, 2009b) brought about by a perceived incongruity (Forabosco 2008), which in turn can be manifested through different forms.

Successful humour requires interlocutors to align their construal of a communicative event (Canestrari 2010; Feyaerts 2013), and that they share or can rapidly switch to a playful mode (Forabosco 2008). Discourse, as represented by the full current discourse space (Langacker 2001), plays a decisive role both in the conceptualisation and expression of humour, as well as in its acknowledgement by the hearer (Attardo 2008; Antonopoulou *et al.* 2015; Yus 2016). Along with conceptual blending, an already widely-used notion in cognitive linguistics studies of humour, the current discourse space can be recruited to analyse and account for humour in interaction thoroughly.

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